



Stories for the Train

Tales on the go

0:4:00

The Birds of Greenwich

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Linnets don't often appear in the gardens of Greenwich, and indeed she had no idea that it was a linnet before consulting her recent charity shop purchase of 'How to attract birds to your garden'. Money well spent, along with the mini-binoculars, essential if a little tricky to keep still.

Male Linnets were popular in Victorian England, their bright crimson patches and melodious call justifying a high price. Females were worth less, not worthless, she reflected, just not worth as much. Their lower value linked to their greyer appearance, far less interesting and therefore monetarily in the drag, so to speak. Surely, Annabel Holmes, late of DBR advertising, could rise above comparing every single event to her current plight? But no, she couldn't.

It was so bloody unfair. One day, there she was, eloquent, persuasive, impressive, heading the pitch to a global concern and winning it with little reduction in contract. Next day, summoned to the boardroom with copies of the offending publication thumbed by directors that were thrown, as was she, in the metaphorical trash can soon after.

It may be called gardening leave, but she knows that it's a compost heap with enforced decay and a slow corporate-rot. All because of her unwillingness to create, read critically, edit well, lead a strong team, fight her corner and be a good 'man', for less, much less.

"That's interesting" she mused, as she lowered the binoculars to check the book. "Another Linnet, *Carduelis cannabina*, to be exact."

Looking closer, page 150 was badly set-out, the attempt at a colour bar at the top woefully inadequate, and the footer was too large for the size of the page, made more apparent by the hairline border enclosing the text and pictures, tut, tut. Standards are slipping in favour of cost she thought, never compromise, never give in.

The offending publication that promoted the wizened expressions of the Grandees, all male, was the industry rag, 'The Ad-man'. Annabel's part in her own downfall was an article entitled 'Define Fair'. The cardinal sin was that, without printing her name, it described a person, duties and a role that could only be occupied by a few women in the industry, narrowed further by a short sentence on the view from the fictional interview room, quite obviously Canary Wharf. The in-house corporate police had picked it up in a flash, as had several other agencies hoping to benefit from the misdemeanour. There were phone calls and emails, all asking for confirmation that the gender injustice at DBR was true.

It's a very calming and satisfying pastime, birdwatching, she thought. Annabel smiled as she glanced over at the letter with the official stamp: MP select committee request for attendance, voluntary. The question is, would she?

Her mobile jiggled and buzzed on the glass surface of the coffee table. The noise grew angry as it contacted her DBR mug, she noticed the linnets had gone, the name on the phone was the one she expected, 'no chance, you can stew you bastard!' She would ignore the call many more times that afternoon, along with the 'ding' each time the repeat email landed. Each buzz testing her will, each 'ding' increasing the satisfaction in her lust for revenge, no, not revenge exactly, a lust for fairness.

She concentrated on the logo of the DBS mug, remembering the banter surrounding the original selection all those years ago. Her valiant efforts in every single argument and negotiation since, gone to waste, down the drain, up the spout, all crap. She picked up the letter, tapping the edge onto her lip as a text arrived, this time she smiled.

"My God, where did that come from?" Mark Holmes, a banker in the city and the second husband of Annabel remarked as he lay, semi-naked in torn white shirt, on the floor of their spacious lounge. The warm orange glow of the evening streamed through the patio doors, gridding the floor, their clothes cut by the dark bars, their bodies segmented rich in gold and still breathing hard.

"Complaining?"

"Not at all, if this is what gardening leave does to you, I'll try some myself!" She knew he meant well.

"Not funny." Annabel untangled limbs and garments and stood clutching, backlit in the soft light. Mark studied her.

"You're going to do it aren't you? Go on screw them, you're good at it."

Annabel threw a slow seductive glance over her shoulder as she glided by the still prostrate and breathless Mark. A confident woman, a woman back in control.

Three days later, the parliamentary secretary opened the letter and added the name Holmes, A, to the list of attendees.

DBR announced an urgent revue of pay equality, a little too late.

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